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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS

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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: March 26 Elections in Rheinland-Pfalz/Baden-Wuerttemberg

REF: A) Frankfurt 1273; B) 2005 Frankfurt 8530

Sensitive but unclassified; not for internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In the days leading up to March 26 state elections, Rheinland-Pfalz (R-P) Minister-President Kurt Beck (SPD/Social Democrats) and Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W) Minister-President Guenther Oettinger (CDU/Christian Democrats) appear to be leading in their efforts to win re-election. The FDP (Free Democratic Party) has indicated its desire to remain in coalition in both states. The leftist WASG continues to poll below the five-percent threshold needed to enter parliament in both states, but could play spoiler (particularly in Rheinland-Pfalz). The large number of undecided voters could mean election-day surprises. Opposition leaders (R-P Christian Democrats and B-W Social Democrats) insist that the elections will be decided during this final week. END SUMMARY.

Rheinland-Pfalz

¶2. (U) Below are polling results as of March 15:

SWR Broadcasting	Forschungsgruppe Wahlen
SPD: 43% (+ 1)	SPD: 43%
CDU: 35% (+ 0)	CDU: 36%
FDP: 9% (+ 1)	FDP: 8%
Greens: 6% (+ 0)	Greens: 6%
WASG: 3% (- 1)	WASG: 3%

¶3. (SBU) M-P Beck and the SPD remain confident that they will gain re-election. The ruling SPD/FDP coalition enjoys favorable job satisfaction numbers (56% of R-P voters support a continuation of the current coalition) and has maintained a steady lead over the CDU in polls over recent months. The SPD is banking on Beck's personal popularity to carry them to victory (even 35% of CDU members favor him over CDU standard-bearer Christoph Boehr). The CDU leadership has conceded nothing, promising to "fight, fight, fight" for every vote. Pointing to last year's results in Schleswig-Holstein (where a CDU candidate defeated a popular and long-standing SPD minister-president), they claim the election will be decided in the final days. As evidence of their determination to give Boehr every chance to win, the CDU is planning a blowout campaign finale in Mainz March 23 that will include all eleven CDU/CSU minister-presidents. COMMENT: Despite their aggressive and high-profile campaign, conservatives face an uphill battle to unseat Beck. Some party insiders say privately that Boehr lacks the ability to connect with voters in the rural state, an art that Beck has mastered. In a press interview, CDU Secretary General Friedrich Schlumberger indirectly acknowledged that Boehr's lack of charisma is a burden on the party, a statement he had to withdraw the following day. END COMMENT.

¶4. (SBU) The Left Party (Linke.WASG) continues to poll below the five percent threshold, but a number of CDU representatives told us they believe the Left Party could cross the five percent threshold to enter parliament (which would benefit the CDU by siphoning votes and seats from the SPD). A full third of the state electorate remains undecided.

Baden-Wuerttemberg

¶5. (U) The CDU/FDP coalition in Baden-Wuerttemberg leads by a solid margin in polls:

SWR Broadcasting	Forschungsgruppe Wahlen
CDU: 46% (+ 0)	45%
SPD: 28% (- 1)	30%
Greens: 10% (+ 0)	10%
FDP: 9% (+ 1)	8%
WASG: 2% (- 1)	3%
Republikaner: 3% (+ 1)	3%

¶6. (U) The CDU has polled consistently over 40% but has declined slightly in recent weeks. Some political observers still predict that the CDU could still gain an absolute majority in the state parliament. The B-W FDP is now campaigning against its coalition partner, hoping to thwart a CDU absolute majority which would force the Free Democrats into opposition. Social Democrats remain optimistic that they will pick up additional votes during the final days of the campaign. A result under 30% would be a disaster for SPD standard-bearer Ute Vogt. Polls indicate that many voters (between 30% and 46%) in B-W are still undecided,

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suggesting that sizable voter swings are still possible.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) The March 26 state elections represent the first electoral test for the grand coalition in Berlin and the most important hurdle so far for new Baden-Wuerttemberg M-P Guenther Oettinger. Attendance at election rallies so far has been weak. If weak voter interest results in low turnout, it could disadvantage the larger mainstream parties (CDU and SPD) and give a boost to the FDP, Greens, and smaller groups like the left-wing WASG and far-right Republikaner (whose supporters tend to be more committed). While media observers predict a continuation of the present coalitions in R-P and B-W, the large number of undecided and weak-preference voters in both states introduces an element of doubt as to the final results. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

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